

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
EASTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI  
SOUTHEASTERN DIVISION**

WARDELL L. WILLIAMS,

Plaintiff,

vs.

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF  
CORRECTIONS, et al.,

Defendants.

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Case No. 1:21-CV-102 SNLJ

**MEMORANDUM AND ORDER**

This matter is before the Court on the motion of self-represented plaintiff Wardell L. Williams, an inmate at the Southeast Correctional Center (“SECC”), for leave to commence this civil action without prepayment of the required filing fee. ECF No. 2. Having reviewed the motion and the financial information submitted in support, the Court has determined that plaintiff lacks sufficient funds to pay the entire filing fee and will assess an initial partial filing fee of \$108.40. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1). Additionally, for the reasons discussed below, the Court will allow plaintiff the opportunity to submit an amended complaint.

**28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1)**

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1), a prisoner bringing a civil action *in forma pauperis* is required to pay the full amount of the filing fee. If the prisoner has insufficient funds in his prison account to pay the entire fee, the Court must assess and, when funds exist, collect an initial partial filing fee of 20 percent of the greater of (1) the average monthly deposits in the prisoner’s account, or (2) the average monthly balance in the prisoner’s account for the prior six-month period. After payment of the initial partial filing fee, the prisoner is required to make monthly payments of 20 percent of the preceding month’s income credited to his account. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(2). The agency having custody of the prisoner will forward these monthly payments to the Clerk of Court

each time the amount in the prisoner's account exceeds \$10.00, until the filing fee is fully paid.  
*Id.*

In support of his motion for leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*, plaintiff submitted a copy of his certified account statement. ECF No. 6. A review of plaintiff's account from the relevant six-month period indicates an average monthly deposit of \$542.00 and an average monthly balance of \$272.24. Plaintiff has insufficient funds to pay the entire filing fee. Accordingly, the Court will assess an initial partial filing fee of \$108.40, which is 20 percent of plaintiff's average monthly deposits.

### **Legal Standard on Initial Review**

Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2), the Court is required to dismiss a complaint filed *in forma pauperis* if it is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted. An action is frivolous if it "lacks an arguable basis in either law or fact." *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 328 (1989). An action fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted if it does not plead "enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face." *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007).

"A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged." *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009). Determining whether a complaint states a plausible claim for relief is a context-specific task that requires the reviewing court to draw upon judicial experience and common sense. *Id.* at 679. The court must assume the veracity of well-pleaded facts but need not accept as true "[t]hreadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements." *Id.* at 678 (citing *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555).

This Court must liberally construe complaints filed by laypeople. *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 106 (1976). This means that "if the essence of an allegation is discernible," the court

should “construe the complaint in a way that permits the layperson’s claim to be considered within the proper legal framework.” *Solomon v. Petray*, 795 F.3d 777, 787 (8th Cir. 2015) (quoting *Stone v. Harry*, 364 F.3d 912, 914 (8th Cir. 2004)). However, even self-represented complaints must allege facts which, if true, state a claim for relief as a matter of law. *Martin v. Aubuchon*, 623 F.2d 1282, 1286 (8th Cir. 1980). Federal courts are not required to assume facts that are not alleged, *Stone*, 364 F.3d at 914-15, nor are they required to interpret procedural rules in order to excuse mistakes by those who proceed without counsel. *See McNeil v. United States*, 508 U.S. 106, 113 (1993).

### **The Complaint**

Self-represented plaintiff filed the instant action on a Prisoner Civil Rights Complaint form pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. ECF No. 1. Plaintiff names six defendants: (1) Missouri Department of Corrections (“MDOC”); (2) Anne Precythe, Director; (3) Jeff Norman, Director; (4) Bill Stange, Warden; (5) Unknown McDaniels, Correctional Officer I; and (6) Britney Doba, Correctional Officer I. Plaintiff states all defendants are employees of the MDOC. Plaintiff specifies he is bringing this action against defendant Precythe in her official capacity only, but does not indicate what capacity he intends to sue the remaining defendants.

Plaintiff alleges that on January 6, 2021 defendant Doba opened his cell door, allowing inmates to enter his cell and stab him several times. Plaintiff asserts defendant McDaniels was responsible for making security checks on the day of his assault. Plaintiff identifies defendants Stange, Norman, and Precythe as the supervisors or “Bosses” who are responsible for the actions of their subordinates. Plaintiff states he filed a grievance “months before the assault occurred,” but defendant Precythe failed to take action.

Plaintiff described his injuries as fractures to his face and eye, a broken hand, and multiple stab wounds on his back. He states he underwent eye and hand surgery, but was denied physical

therapy by the MDOC. For relief, plaintiff seeks monetary damages in the amount of one million dollars and “an additional ten thousand dollars for pain and suffering.”

Attached to the complaint are copies of his MDOC informal resolution request (“IRR”), IRR denial, grievance, grievance response, appeal, and appeal response. ECF No. 1-1. Within these documents, plaintiff complains about the incident that is the subject of this lawsuit. Plaintiff’s grievances were denied by the MDOC for failure to provide evidence that SECC staff did not conduct security checks or opened his cell door.

### **Discussion**

Having thoroughly reviewed and liberally construed plaintiff’s complaint, the Court concludes that it is subject to dismissal. However, in consideration of plaintiff’s self-represented status, the Court will allow him to file an amended complaint.

#### **A. Claim against the Missouri Department of Corrections**

Plaintiff’s complaint is legally frivolous against the MDOC because it cannot be sued under § 1983. The MDOC is a department of the State of Missouri. Suing the MDOC is the same as suing the State of Missouri itself. As such, plaintiff’s claim against the MDOC is subject to dismissal for two reasons. First, the State of Missouri is not a “person” for purposes of 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Second, the State of Missouri is protected by the doctrine of sovereign immunity.

##### ***1. State is Not a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 “Person”***

“Section 1983 provides for an action against a ‘person’ for a violation, under color of law, of another’s civil rights.” *McLean v. Gordon*, 548 F.3d 613, 618 (8th Cir. 2008); *see also Deretich v. Office of Admin. Hearings*, 798 F.2d 1147, 1154 (8th Cir. 1986) (stating that “[§] 1983 provides a cause of action against persons only”). However, “neither a State nor its officials acting in their official capacity are ‘persons’ under § 1983.” *Will v. Michigan Dep’t of State Police*, 491 U.S. 58, 71 (1989); *see also Calzone v. Hawley*, 866 F.3d 866, 872 (8th Cir. 2017) (asserting that a “State

is not a person under § 1983”); and *Kruger v. Nebraska*, 820 F.3d 295, 301 (8th Cir. 2016) (explaining that “a state is not a person for purposes of a claim for money damages under § 1983”).

Here, plaintiff has sued the MDOC. A claim against a department of the State is treated as being made against the State. However, a state is not a “person” for purposes of a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 claim for money damages, which is what plaintiff is seeking. Because plaintiff is missing an essential element of a § 1983 action, his claim against the MDOC is subject to dismissal.

## **2. Sovereign Immunity**

“Sovereign immunity is the privilege of the sovereign not to be sued without its consent.” *Va. Office for Prot. & Advocacy v. Stewart*, 563 U.S. 247, 253 (2011). The Eleventh Amendment has been held to confer immunity on an un-consenting state from lawsuits brought in federal court by a state’s own citizens or the citizens of another state. *Edelman v. Jordan*, 415 U.S. 651, 662-63 (1974); *see also Webb v. City of Maplewood*, 889 F.3d 483, 485 (8th Cir. 2018) (“The Eleventh Amendment protects States and their arms and instrumentalities from suit in federal court”); *Dover Elevator Co. v. Ark. State Univ.*, 64 F.3d 442, 446 (8th Cir. 1995) (“The Eleventh Amendment bars private parties from suing a state in federal court”); and *Egerdahl v. Hibbing Cmty. Coll.*, 72 F.3d 615, 618-19 (8th Cir. 1995) (“Generally, in the absence of consent a suit in which the State or one of its agencies or departments is named as the defendant is proscribed by the Eleventh Amendment”). The Eleventh Amendment bars suit against a state or its agencies for any kind of relief, not merely monetary damages. *Monroe v. Arkansas State Univ.*, 495 F.3d 591, 594 (8th Cir. 2007) (stating that district court erred in allowing the plaintiff to proceed against state university for injunctive relief, and remanding matter to district court for dismissal).

There are two “well-established exceptions” to the sovereign immunity provided by the Eleventh Amendment. *Barnes v. State of Missouri*, 960 F.2d 62, 64 (8th Cir. 1992). “The first exception to Eleventh Amendment immunity is where Congress has statutorily abrogated such

immunity by clear and unmistakable language.” *Id.* The second exception is when a state waives its immunity to suit in federal court. *Id.* at 65. A state will be found to have waived its immunity “only where stated by the most express language or by such overwhelming implications from the text as will leave no room for any other reasonable construction.” *Welch v. Tex. Dep’t of Highways & Pub. Transp.*, 483 U.S. 468, 473 (1987). Neither exception is applicable in this case.

The first exception is inapplicable because the Supreme Court has determined that § 1983 does not revoke a state’s Eleventh Amendment immunity from suit in federal court. *See Will*, 491 U.S. at 66 (“We cannot conclude that § 1983 was intended to disregard the well-established immunity of a State from being sued without its consent”); and *Quern v. Jordan*, 440 U.S. 332, 341 (1979) (“[W]e simply are unwilling to believe . . . that Congress intended by the general language of § 1983 to override the traditional sovereign immunity of the States”). The second exception is also inapplicable because the State of Missouri has not waived its sovereign immunity in this type of case. *See Mo. Rev. Stat. 537.600* (explaining that sovereign immunity is in effect and providing exceptions).

In this case, plaintiff has named the MDOC as a defendant. As noted above, the Eleventh Amendment bars suit against a state or its agencies for both monetary and injunctive relief. Furthermore, no exceptions to sovereign immunity are present in this case. Therefore, plaintiff’s claim against the MDOC is subject to dismissal for this reason as well.

### **B. Official Capacity Claims**

Plaintiff brings this action against defendant Precythe in her official capacity only. Plaintiff does not specify what capacity he intends to sue the remaining defendants. If a plaintiff’s complaint is silent about the capacity in which the defendant is being sued, the complaint is interpreted as including only official capacity claims. *Id. See also Johnson v. Outboard Marine Corp.*, 172 F.3d 531, 535 (8th Cir. 1999) (“[I]n order to sue a public official in his or her individual capacity, a



plaintiff must expressly and unambiguously state so in the pleadings, otherwise, it will be assumed that the defendant is sued only in his or her official capacity”); *Artis v. Francis Howell North Band Booster Ass’n, Inc.*, 161 F.3d 1178, 1182 (8th Cir. 1998) (“If the complaint does not specifically name the defendant in his individual capacity, it is presumed he is sued only in his official capacity”); and *Egerdahl v. Hibbing Cmty. Coll.*, 72 F.3d 615, 619 (8th Cir. 1995) (“If a plaintiff’s complaint is silent about the capacity in which she is suing the defendant, we interpret the complaint as including only official-capacity claims”). Thus, the Court assumes all defendants to be sued in their official capacities only.

Plaintiff’s official capacity claims are subject to dismissal because a “suit against a public employee in his or her official capacity is merely a suit against the public employer.” *Johnson v. Outboard Marine Corp.*, 172 F.3d 531, 535 (8th Cir. 1999); *see also Brewington v. Keener*, 902 F.3d 796, 800 (8th Cir. 2018) (explaining that official capacity suit against a sheriff and his deputy “must be treated as a suit against the County”); *Kelly v. City of Omaha, Neb.*, 813 F.3d 1070, 1075 (8th Cir. 2016) (stating that a “plaintiff who sues public employees in their official, rather than individual, capacities sues only the public employer”); and *Elder-Keep v. Aksamit*, 460 F.3d 979, 986 (8th Cir. 2006) (stating that a “suit against a public official in his official capacity is actually a suit against the entity for which the official is an agent”).

In this case, all defendants are alleged to be employees of the MDOC and, therefore, are employees of the State of Missouri. As noted above, plaintiff cannot bring a claim for damages against the State of Missouri under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 because the state is not a “person.” *See Will*, 491 U.S. at 71 (asserting that “neither a State nor its officials acting in their official capacity are ‘persons’ under § 1983”). Furthermore, “[a] claim for damages against a state employee in his official capacity is barred under the Eleventh Amendment.” *See Andrus ex rel. Andrus v. Arkansas*, 197 F.3d 953, 955 (8th Cir. 1999).

Plaintiff has not brought this action against the defendants in their individual capacities. As such, the Court will not review plaintiff's complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915 as to whether it can survive initial review against the named defendants in their individual capacities. However, in consideration of plaintiff's self-represented status and the severity of the allegations and injuries, the Court will permit him to file an amended complaint. If plaintiff wishes to sue defendants in their individual capacities, plaintiff must specifically say so in the amended complaint. If plaintiff fails to sue defendants in their individual capacities, this action may be dismissed after this Court's review of his amended complaint.

### **Instructions on Amending the Complaint**

Plaintiff is warned that the filing of an amended complaint replaces the original complaint, and so it must include all claims plaintiff wishes to bring. *See In re Wireless Telephone Federal Cost Recovery Fees Litigation*, 396 F.3d 922, 928 (8th Cir. 2005) ("It is well-established that an amended complaint supersedes an original complaint and renders the original complaint without legal effect"). Plaintiff must type or neatly print the amended complaint on the Court's prisoner civil rights complaint form, which will be provided to him. *See* E.D. Mo. L.R. 45 – 2.06(A) ("All actions brought by self-represented plaintiffs or petitioners should be filed on Court-provided forms").

In the "Caption" section of the amended complaint, plaintiff must state the first and last name, to the extent he knows it, of each defendant he wishes to sue. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 10(a) ("The title of the complaint must name all the parties"). Plaintiff must avoid naming anyone as a defendant unless that person is directly related to his claim. **Plaintiff must also specify whether he intends to sue each defendant in his or her individual capacity, official capacity, or both.**

In the "Statement of Claim" section, plaintiff should begin by writing the defendant's name. In separate, numbered paragraphs under that name, plaintiff should set forth a short and



plain statement of the facts that support his claim or claims against that defendant. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a). Each averment must be simple, concise, and direct. *See id.* Plaintiff must state his claims in numbered paragraphs, and each paragraph should be “limited as far as practicable to a single set of circumstances.” *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 10(b). If plaintiff names a single defendant, he may set forth as many claims as he has against that defendant. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 18(a). If plaintiff names more than one defendant, he should only include claims that arise out of the same transaction or occurrence, or simply put, claims that are related to each other. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 20(a)(2).

It is important that plaintiff allege facts explaining how each defendant was personally involved in or directly responsible for harming him. *See Madewell*, 909 F.2d at 1208. A claim alleging the liability of a party solely because he or she held an administrative or supervisory position is not cognizable in a civil rights action. *See Boyd v. Knox*, 47 F.3d 966, 968 (8th Cir. 1995) (*respondeat superior* theory inapplicable in § 1983 cases). A supervisor is liable for the actions of his subordinates under § 1983 only if he personally participates in the alleged unconstitutional conduct, or when there is a causal connection between his actions and the alleged constitutional deprivation. *See Glick v. Sargent*, 696 F.2d 413, 415 (8th Cir. 1983) (warden must play a personal role in the disciplinary process; he cannot be held liable for the outcome of the process).

Plaintiff must explain the role of the defendant, so that the defendant will have notice of what he or she is accused of doing or failing to do. *See Topchian v. JPMorgan Chase Bank, N.A.*, 760 F.3d 843, 848 (8th Cir. 2014) (stating that the essential function of a complaint “is to give the opposing party fair notice of the nature and basis or grounds for a claim.”). Furthermore, the Court emphasizes that the “Statement of Claim” requires more than “labels and conclusions or a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action.” *See Neubauer v. FedEx Corp.*, 849 F.3d

400, 404 (8th Cir. 2017). Plaintiff must not amend a complaint by filing separate documents. Instead, he must file a single, comprehensive pleading that sets forth his claims for relief.

### **Motion to Appoint Counsel**

Plaintiff has filed a motion to appoint counsel. ECF No. 3. In civil cases, a self-represented litigant does not have a constitutional or statutory right to appointed counsel. *Ward v. Smith*, 721 F.3d 940, 942 (8th Cir. 2013). *See also Stevens v. Redwing*, 146 F.3d 538, 546 (8th Cir. 1998) (stating that “[a] pro se litigant has no statutory or constitutional right to have counsel appointed in a civil case”). Rather, a district court may appoint counsel in a civil case if the court is “convinced that an indigent plaintiff has stated a non-frivolous claim . . . and where the nature of the litigation is such that plaintiff as well as the court will benefit from the assistance of counsel.” *Patterson v. Kelley*, 902 F.3d 845, 850 (8th Cir. 2018). When determining whether to appoint counsel for an indigent litigant, a court considers relevant factors such as the complexity of the case, the ability of the self-represented litigant to investigate the facts, the existence of conflicting testimony, and the ability of the self-represented litigant to present his or her claim. *Phillips v. Jasper Cty. Jail*, 437 F.3d 791, 794 (8th Cir. 2006).

After considering these factors, the Court finds that the appointment of counsel is unwarranted at this time. Plaintiff has yet to file a complaint that survives initial review, so it cannot be said that he has presented non-frivolous claims. Additionally, this case appears to involve straightforward factual and legal issues, and there is no indication that plaintiff cannot investigate the facts and present his claims to the Court. The Court will therefore deny his motion without prejudice, and will entertain future motions for appointment of counsel, if appropriate, as the case progresses.

Accordingly,

**IT IS HEREBY ORDERED** that plaintiff's motion to proceed *in forma pauperis* [ECF No. 2] is **GRANTED**.

**IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that plaintiff shall pay an initial filing fee of \$108.40 within thirty (30) days of the date of this Order. Plaintiff is instructed to make his remittance payable to "Clerk, United States District Court," and to include upon it: (1) his name; (2) his prison registration number; (3) the case number; and (4) that the remittance is for an original proceeding.

**IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that the Clerk of Court shall mail to plaintiff two blank Prisoner Civil Rights Complaint forms. Plaintiff may request additional forms as needed.

**IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that, within **thirty (30) days of the date of this Memorandum and Order**, plaintiff shall submit an amended complaint in accordance with the instructions set forth herein.

**IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that plaintiff's Motion to Appoint Counsel (ECF No. 3) is **DENIED** without prejudice at this time.

**IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that if plaintiff fails to timely comply with this Memorandum and Order, the Court will dismiss this action without prejudice and without further notice.

Dated this 14th day of January, 2022.



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STEPHEN N. LIMBAUGH, JR.  
SENIOR UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE